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ABSTRACT

This study explored the relationship between teachers' sense of efficacy and their willingness to engage in a work-focused, trusting, professional relationship with colleagues. Interviews and conference transcripts were gathered from 10 dyads of teachers from three elementary schools in a large Canadian city. Each dyad engaged in at least four collaborative consultation cycles, each consisting of: (1) a pre-observation goal setting conference; (2) classroom observation data collection; and (3) a post-observation data sharing and analysis conference. Each post-observation conference was audiotaped and studied by researchers as preparation for a research interview following each cycle. Results suggest that increasing confidence enables teachers to allow fellow teachers to observe them, while less confident teachers have a harder time entering into this trusting relationship. Recommendations include keeping summative evaluation and formative supervision processes distinct, encouraging teachers to select their own partners for collaboration, and pursuing further research on techniques for increasing teachers' confidence in their own abilities. (Contains 18 references.) (PB)

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TEACHER EFFICACY AND THE CAPACITY TO TRUST

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Teacher Efficacy and the Capacity to Trust

It has long been assumed that trust between a teacher and his or her teaching partner was a necessary pre-condition for the success of teacher collaboration models such as clinical supervision, collegial consultation, differentiated supervision, and collaborative consultation. During informal conversations with two practicing elementary teachers, they suggested that their willingness to "open up" to a colleague was inextricably linked to their own sense of their abilities as teachers. This study was thus conceived and was designed to address the question: "What is the relationship between a teacher's sense of efficacy and his or her willingness to engage in a work-focused, trusting, professional relationship with a colleague or colleagues?"

Two objectives are served by this proposed study. The first objective is to develop theory regarding the role of teacher efficacy in the development and maintenance of a climate for engaging in a program of teacher collaboration in which trust between the teacher and teaching-partner are of paramount importance. The second objective is to develop practical suggestions for developing or enhancing trust between teachers and teaching-partners engaging in a program of teacher collaboration. These recommendations have implications for teachers, school districts, and university faculties of education.

Relationship to Existing Research and Literature

For over 20 years educational researchers have been documenting teacher isolation (e.g., Lortie, 1975; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Little, 1987; Gresso & Robertson, 1992). For almost as long, various researchers have been calling for teachers to work collaboratively in small teams to "break the isolation of the classroom" (Little, 1987, p. 494). A recent Instructional Supervision, AERA Special Interest Group Newsletter (1995) carried a discussion of the trend toward greater teacher collaboration in supervision; in it the pervasiveness of the calls for greater collaboration centered on three beliefs

about collaboration, namely that it is: (a) more effective than traditional, individual practice; (b) ethically desirable; and, (c) part of a larger social trend towards greater democratization of practice and egalitarianism.

The reported benefits of teachers working in pairs or small groups with colleagues do not come as a surprise. The literature is replete with examples of instructional support teams (e.g., Sgan & Clark, 1986), clinical supervision dyads (e.g., Grimmett & Crehan, 1990), site-based decision making and management (Brown, 1994), shared decision making (e.g., Alvarez, 1992) and their advantages not only to the participants but also to their organizations. Acheson and Gall (1992), da Costa (1993), Grimmett and Erickson (1988), Hargreaves (1994), Oberg (1989) believed that when teachers actively participate in regular, systematic consultation, they will reflect more on the methods and content of their daily instruction, which in turn leads to changes in the classroom which, presumably, have a positive effect on student learning.

A major assumption made by those advocating the use of teacher collaboration for the purpose of teacher development is that a climate of trust exists. To address the problem of developing the necessary trust between teachers and their teaching-partners, the literature (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1986; Russell & Spafford, 1986) called for the involvement of peers in the collaboration process rather than administrators. However, this suggestion did little more than to remove some of the apprehension that some teachers may have experienced when they were involved in the formative supervision process with someone who had, or was perceived to have, summative supervision responsibilities for evaluation of teaching performance. Engaging peers, as suggested by the literature, does not automatically ensure that a trusting climate is generated: peers can also be distrustful of each other. Furthermore, da Costa (1995) found that teacher collaboration teams consisting of teachers and administrators can develop trusting and respectful relationships even when the administrator is responsible for the summative evaluation of the teacher. Lyman, Morehead, and Foyle (1988) identified three qualities necessary for the establishment of trust: (a) the teacher must believe that the information gathered by the colleague will not somehow be used evaluatively; (b) sufficient time for building trust

must be provided so that the anxiety about the process can be reduced and, ultimately, eliminated; and, (c) in addition to providing time to build trust, the individuals must have the patience for building a trusting relationship. The literature remains silent about the role that teachers' confidence in their teaching abilities plays in the development of trust between colleagues engaging in teacher collaboration.

Teachers' confidence in their teaching abilities, as a construct, has been explored in the literature since the mid-seventies (e.g., Armor et al., 1976; Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Bandura, 1977, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Armor et al. (1976) and Berman et al. (1977) described teacher efficacy as the extent to which the teacher believed he or she had the capacity to affect student performance. Refining this construct further, Bandura (1977) and Gibson and Dembo (1984) argued that teacher efficacy is based on two distinct beliefs, namely that: (a) a particular behaviour will lead to desired outcomes, and (b) one has the requisite skills to bring about the desired outcomes. As early as 1984, Gibson and Dembo proposed that:

> . . . teachers who believe that student learning can be influenced by effective teaching, and who also have confidence in their own teaching abilities would persist longer, provide a greater academic focus in the classroom, and exhibit different types of feedback than teachers who have lower expectations concerning their ability to influence student learning. (p. 570)

It is the role of these beliefs in the development of trust between teacher collaboration partners that is the main subject of this paper.

Method and Data Source

This investigation made extensive use of semi-structured interviews with teachers and teaching-partners who engaged in a systematic program of teacher collaboration. Conferences held between members of dyads were also audio-taped, transcribed, and analysed. The analyses of the interview and conference data were conducted through the use of narrative accounts to support emerging themes. To

enhance the trustworthiness of the study, an audit trail was provided so that emerging themes could be verified by a second researcher. Furthermore, all participants in the study were provided with copies of their transcripts and of the analyses of the transcripts so that the veracity of the interpretations made could be ascertained.

Teachers who had participated in a Supervision of Instruction course, taught by one of the researchers, focusing on the theory and implementation of teacher collaborative consultation as a professional development tool, during the spring of 1994 were asked to participate in this investigation. As such, this course served as the mechanism for educating and training the participants in the use of collaborative consultation as a professional development tool. Data were gathered between the beginning of October and the end of May during the 1994/95 academic school year.

The Participants

Ten teachers–five dyads--volunteered to participate in this study. These dyads are best described as "reciprocal dyads" in which the teacher and the teaching-partner exchange roles periodically as desired by the teacher and his or her partner. That there were nine female teachers and only one male teacher in the sample is not unusual given the small number of male teachers providing instruction at the elementary level. In Canada, women comprise 94% of the grades K to 3 teachers and 72% of the grades 4 to 6 teachers. The volunteers represented three elementary schools in a large urban center with one person from each of the schools having engaged in the Supervision of Instruction course described above. Overall, the volunteers represented a broad cross-section of classroom teaching experience ranging from 1 year to just over 20 years. All of the dyads were remarkably similar in terms of the length of time that the members had been working together in a "work focused collaboration team." See table 1 for further detail regarding the characteristics of the respondents.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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The Process

All of dyads were asked to engage in a minimum of four collaborative consultation (CC) cycles, drawing on the principles of Cogan (1973) and Goldhammer's (1980) clinical supervision, consisting of: (a) pre-observation goal setting conference, (b) classroom observation data collection, and (c) post-observation data sharing and analysis conference. Each of the post-observation conferences were audio-taped and provided to the researchers in preparation for the interview which followed each CC cycle.

Although the respondents were asked to engage in a minimum of four CC cycles, there was deviation in the actual numbers of CC cycles completed by the end of the year. The total number of CC cycles completed by the dyads ranged from two to five (see table 1).

The Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with the teachers took place prior to the teachers beginning their collaboration early in the school year (see Appendix A) and then after each CC cycle (see Appendix B). All interviews subsequent to the first were conducted after the interviewer had had an opportunity to review the audio-tape of the post-observation conference that had just taken place. These interviews typically lasted 25 minutes with some as brief as 15 minutes and others exceeding 90 minutes. All

participants were provided with copies of verbatim transcripts of their conferences and interviews so that they could ascertain the veracity of the data.

The Interviewers

The interviewers consisted of the authors. In keeping with the naturalistic data analysis approach being used, both researchers kept notes of their thoughts and interpretations as data were gathered. These thoughts and interpretations were discussed by the researchers in order to obtain intersubjective agreement. As a result of these discussions, questions were altered and added to address emerging concerns.

Data Analysis

Following verification by the participants, the transcripts were analyzed independently by the authors. Narrative accounts were identified to support emerging themes. Because of the naturalistic qualities of this study, data analysis was an ongoing and tentative process.

At the conclusion of the study, respondents were each provided with a preliminary analysis of the data gathered. All of the respondents were invited to respond to and challenge the interpretations and assertions being made. Those responses formed further data for analysis and inclusion in this report.

Limitations

This study focused on teachers' perceptions of their abilities to affect student learning and their relationships with teaching-partners, not on actual teaching performances or absolute measures of trust between themselves and their partners. Furthermore, because of the small, purposive sampling method

used the results offered in this study need to be viewed cautiously. These results are not truly generalizable beyond the group of teachers involved in the study. However, as an exploratory study the findings described here do provide a good starting point for discussion in terms of theoretical and practical issues related to having teachers work collaboratively for the purpose of enhancing their teaching.

Findings and Discussion

The following will focus on a description and discussion of the findings garnered in the present study. This section is divided into five sub-sections. The first four sub-sections address the four main themes that emerged from the data; the fifth section addresses the research question outlined at the end of the first paragraph in this paper.

Self-selection versus Administrative Assignment of Dyads

For teachers working in schools where the formation of teacher collaboration teams was mandated, trust seemed to have developed more slowly than for those teachers working in schools in which the individuals elected to collaborate--even when the team electing to collaborate consisted of a teacher and an administrator responsible for the summative evaluation of the teacher. This appears to have manifested itself in the participants' actions directed at over-coming what was seen as a major barrier to CC: the lack of time to meet.

A number of participants shared insights regarding how they knew that they were working with the "right person" in this collaboration process. Bob started off by saying "You have to ask the right person. Some teachers I still would not ask . . . I would ask them the time of day and they'd tell me to go get a watch." Similarly, Bob's partner stated that "we were so in sync, I guess it just sort of worked." In response to the same probing, Cathy said: ". . . I like conferencing with somebody that you're on the

same wave-length with." The teachers in the dyads from both Peapod Elementary and Farwest Elementary were very explicit about their trust for their partners. This feeling is best summed by Bob's comment that "I don't worry that Bev's going to say 'well, you did this, you didn't mention this to the students and look how you buggered up.' No one's going to use that against me. I don't expect her to." It was amply obvious that these individuals trusted their partners and liked to spend time with them. Being part of a work-focused CC team seemed to offer these individuals more reason to be able to spend time together.

In discussions with the respondents, the lack of time available to work collaboratively was often brought up as a drawback to the process. Yet, if one looks simply at the total number of CC cycles which were completed by the end of the school year, it seems that those teachers who had not been administratively assigned to dyads were better able to find the time to meet than those who had not.

Administratively assigned dyads. Mary--who in subsequent conversations with one of the authors indicated that she was committed to the notion of CC and has implemented it in a new school where she is now principal--expressed frustration with the lack of time, her perception of what CC had become was apparent in her comment: "It's the time. . . . Finding the time for it [collaborating] and then it becomes another demand that we have to fulfil." Similarly, Linda suggested that not very much time could be devoted to the collaboration activity because of other demands: ". . . we were really rushed the day we did the post-conference."

Self-selected dyads. Also identifying lack of time as a problem were the teachers from Peapod Elementary and Farwest Elementary; however, these teachers were able to overcome their lack of time in rather innovative ways. Bob and Bev from Peapod Elementary found time to observe each other by combining their classes and co-teaching them--they were then able to discuss and give meaning to what had transpired in their combined group during post-conferences held immediately after-school. Cathy and Cindy from Farwest Elementary were able to address their lack of time by meeting over "a few working lunches and dinners."

Selecting the Focus of the Collaborative Consultation Cycle

The degree of trust established seems to greatly impact the choice of issues that become the focus of the work-focused collaboration process. A cursory examination of the issues selected by teachers over the course of the year as the focus of their collaboration cycles tended to show, for example, a progression from examining and making changes to, what are often considered safe and easily changed behaviours, question distribution amongst students to, more challenging issues, such as trying to assess--and ultimately increase--the degree to which the teacher addressed the differing needs, abilities, and personalities of all students in a heterogeneously grouped class.

The general consensus of the teachers participating in this study was that it was easier to share ideas on more sensitive topics after having collaborated for four or five months than it had been initially, even for those teachers who had known each other before beginning to collaborate. Intuitively, this seems to make sense since even those teachers who had pre-established relationships had to make a slight "shift" in terms of the focus of their relationship: from a congenial friendship to a collegial, work-focused partnership.

Teacher Confidence

Teachers who have high levels of teaching efficacy are more likely to allow other individuals--teachers or administrators--into trusting professional relationships more readily than teachers with lower teaching efficacy.

Comments from some of the more experienced and confident teachers in this study suggested that even though the topics they were addressing in their CC cycles were of a sensitive nature, they perceived themselves to have enough expertise that they could address any unforseen problems that might arise. For these teachers letting someone into their classrooms was not perceived as taking as much of a "risk" as it might be for the less confident teachers who might perceive themselves as not

being able to cope with any problematic situation that might arise. Along this vein, Bob explained:

> If you've tried something in the best interest of the students, I've learned as a teacher you can defend it too . . . perhaps it didn't work out the way I wanted, here is the plan, as long as you have a plan and it's fitting with the curriculum . . . you can justify and if it falls on its face, it's not for lack of effort.

The importance of instilling this sense of confidence in her partner was so strong for Mary that she felt that it was important to emphasize and remind Marg of her abilities. Mary saw Marg as a very good and capable teacher whose self-confidence could be bolstered. When questioned further about this, Mary stated:

> I think as we went on through it, I felt really good. Because Marg was picking up on the observation, she was feeding into them [the observations made] as well and it seemed like we were actually getting to grips with what the data was [sic] showing us . . . . At the end, I know that both of us felt really "up" when we'd finished because we'd gone through this process and we found some really positive things and I always feel good about reinforcing the positives with a good teacher.

Teacher Confidence and the Subject Matter of Post-Observation Conferences

In highly trusting relationships in which teachers were confident in their teaching abilities the norms related to discussing topics related to pedagogy were such that these discussions were not confined to the pre- and post-observation conferences, they occurred at any time the teacher and the teaching-partner thought it was appropriate.

While all of the dyads reported having adhered, during the post-observation conference discussions, to the foci established during the pre-observation goal setting conferences, two distinct differences emerged between the teachers from Valleyview Elementary school and the other teachers.

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The teachers from Valleyview Elementary reported that the foci of the post-observation conferences remained within the bounds of their previous agreements. No topics outside of those discussed during the pre-observation conferences were addressed during the post-observation conferences. The teachers from Farwest Elementary and Peapod Elementary schools all reported that although the primary focus of the post-observation conferences had been discussed during the pre-observation conferences, the discussion went well beyond these "pre-agreed-to-topics." Cathy captured the essence of what these teachers were communicating when she said: "Even if something happened that I thought was a total disaster . . . Cindy would say 'well, maybe you could do this, or try this' and I would say 'yeah, I need to do it, good idea.'" The basic premise on which these teachers appeared to be working, with respect to the topics of discussion during the post-observation conferences, was that although the data gathered were examined on the basis of the criteria established during the pre-observation conference, these data were also explored and analyzed from perspectives that had not been pre-determined. Anything was fair game for discussion, however, it was always approached from the perspective of teacher-growth rather than from evaluative or condescending perspectives.

There was a sense in which these teachers saw themselves as needing to be protective of their partners, a sense in which these teachers saw themselves as not only being responsible for their own teaching but also--to an extent--for their partners' teaching. These teachers expected their partners to raise issues that they overlooked, they felt confident enough in their teaching abilities that they knew that something could be done to address any issue.

The Research Question

The following is offered in response to the question posed at the beginning of this study, "What is the relationship between a teacher's sense of efficacy and his or her willingness to engage in a work-focused, trusting, professional relationship with a colleague or colleagues?"

There does indeed appear to be a relationship between a teacher's perception of his or her

teaching abilities and that person's willingness to work with another person for the purpose of professional development. As teaching efficacy increases, it appears that teachers perceive allowing less trusted individuals into their classrooms as being less of a risk than might be perceived by teachers with less confidence in their teaching abilities. These confident teachers "know" that they will be able to handle any situation they might find themselves in, and if they do not handle a particular situation well, they can justify their actions pedagogically and look for alternative approaches to use in the future should the situation arise again.

If one thinks of teaching as being analogous to learning to drive a car, the novice, less confident driver is very self-conscious and perhaps spends too much time looking at his or her feet for proper placement on the pedals or focuses on the vehicle's hood ornament. For the experienced, confident driver the actual mechanical operation of the vehicle becomes second-nature; this person is able to focus on what is occurring ahead, behind, and to the sides of the vehicle. Furthermore, because of the high level of awareness, the confident driver is able to anticipate the need for and provide appropriate corrective action. Less confident drivers are not likely to want to drive with anyone who may be perceived as not willing to be helpful or who may bring the possession of a driver's license into jeopardy. The confident drivers will be willing to drive with anyone, but will prefer to drive with someone they trust. For teachers this confidence-trust analogy is depicted in Figure 1. From this figure it appears that the need is for the teachers to move from the bottom-left to the upper-right of the grid if they are to become effective in the classroom through the use of collaborative techniques.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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In light of these findings, it is speculated that the four quadrants identified in Figure 1 correspond to the perceptions of different relationships experienced by teachers working in dyads. This framework is offered tentatively as a means to conceptualize how the relationship between trust for the teaching-partner and teacher-efficacy might be related.

The bottom-left quadrant is illustrative of relationships, particularly at the extreme end of the "risk" continuum, which demonstrate little or no enthusiasm for the professional growth potential of the relationship. The issues identified by the participants, who are not efficacious and not trusting of their partners, are typically superficial in nature and of little consequence to the teachers. The upper-left quadrant is characteristic of relationships in which teachers perceive themselves to already possess excellent teaching skills and are not very trusting of their partners. These teachers appear to express little interest in collaboration and are unlikely to proceed in any collaborative efforts. The bottom-right quadrant typifies novice teachers who have realized the limits of their teaching abilities and have been able to find a more experienced mentor with whom to work. These teachers appear place a great deal of faith in their partners' pedagogical knowledge. Relationships falling into the upper-right quadrant are perceived by teachers to have very little risk associated with them. These teachers have a high degree of confidence in their teaching abilities and, because they trust their partners, they are willing to experiment with and critically assess innovative techniques in the classroom. These teachers seem to be enthusiastic about the professional growth potential of their collaborative relationships.

Recommendations for Research and Practice

Six recommendations are evident from the present research. The first four recommendations address practical issues of implementing, at the school level, teacher collaboration for the purpose of professional development. These recommendations were conceived with the underlying goal of enabling teachers to develop, as quickly as possible: (a) highly trusting relationships with teaching-partners and (b) a high degree of confidence in their abilities to teach. The last two recommendations address

potential future research for exploring further the development of trust and teacher confidence viz teacher collaboration.

1. Keep summative evaluation and formative supervision processes distinct. Information gathered during formative supervision cycles should not become part of teachers' summative evaluations as it will stifle any risk-taking that might otherwise occur in the teacher collaboration process.

2. Personnel should not engage in formative supervision with teachers for whom there is a summative evaluation responsibility; it is crucial that school administrators--who typically are also responsible for summative evaluation--provide the necessary support (e.g., time) for teachers to collaborate, but highly trusting, professional formative relationships involving a person responsible for summative evaluation are very difficult to nurture and maintain.

3. Teachers should be allowed, and even encouraged, to select their own partners for teacher collaboration purposes.

4. To increase teacher confidence, all teachers need to be aware of and able to draw on the literature regarding effective teaching when making pedagogical decisions. For school districts this means providing, in addition to collaborative supervision, periodic workshops reviewing the latest literature on effective teaching and providing opportunities, first, for teachers to have new techniques modeled for them and, second, to get feedback on the use of the techniques. This might be provided by the practitioners themselves or by developing mutually beneficial partnerships between school districts and local university faculties of education. To supplement these periodic workshops it is also suggested that school districts adopt a policy in which research oriented journals become part of a "professional" library at each school. For universities, this means that faculties of education should provide specific opportunities for

students to learn about this literature and the professors of those faculties should model for their students the various techniques described by the literature (i.e., it is not adequate to lecture to students about the techniques of cooperative learning).

5. The research question explored here, or variants of it, should be explored using different research methodology. In particular, the framework tentatively offered in Figure 1 should be tested for its veracity with a much larger sample.

6. Further research should address other techniques, given teachers' perceptions, of increasing teachers' confidence in their teaching abilities.

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Appendix A

Interview Schedule 1

1. How did you come to know one another?
2. How long have you known one another?
3. What influenced you to work with your partner?
4. Have you worked together before? If so, what was the nature of that work?
5. What do you presently understand the teacher collaboration process to be?
6. Have you decided what it is that you are going to get out of this process? If you haven't decided, what sorts of things do you hope to get out of the process?
7. What do you believe is most important about teaching? In other words, what do you perceive good teaching is?

Appendix B

Interview Schedule 2

1. What was the focus of your observation?

2. How was it decided that this was what you were going to look for?

3. What was the focus of your post-observation conference?

4a. Did you and your partner stray from the focus that you had decided originally?

4b. If so, how?

4c. Did it bother you in any way?

5. As a result of observing your partner teach and then speaking to one another, what did you learn about your class that you didn't know before?

6. As a result of the classroom observation and the conference afterwards is there anything that you will repeat in the future because it went so well?

7. Is there anything that you will change in the future because it didn't seem to work very well?

8. What do your students think about having your partner in your class?

9. Which respect to your teaching, what do you find most useful about being able to talk to your partner?

10. I'd like you to think about the conference that you and your partner audio-taped for me.

10a. What sorts of words would you use to describe how you were feeling when you first started the discussion?

10b. What sorts of words would you use to describe how you were feeling in the middle of the discussion?

10c. What sorts of words would you use to describe how you were feeling as the conference drew to a close?

10d. What do you especially like about conferencing?

10e. What don't you particularly care for in this conferencing process?

Table 1. Respondents' demographic data

Name	School	Position in school	How team was formed	Does teacher evaluation	Engaged in Super-vision course	Teaching experience	Time at present school	Time teachers have known each other	Time collab. with each other	No. of CC cycles completed in 1 year
Bob	Peapod Elem.	Music/ Computer teacher	Chose to work together	No	Yes	14 yrs	2 yrs	2 yrs	1 yr	5
Bev		Classroom teacher		No	No	16 yrs	8 yrs			
Cathy	Farwest Elem.	VP/ classroom teacher	Chose to work together	Yes	Yes	15 yrs	5 yrs	15 yrs	1 yr	4
Cindy		Classroom teacher		No	No	15 yrs	10 yrs			
Jane	Valley-view Elem.	Speech Pathologist	Administrativeassignment through consultation process	No	No	6 yrs	5 yrs	1 yr	1 yr	4
Jill		Classroom teacher		No	No	13 yrs	1 yrs			
Mary	Valley-view Elem.	Principal/ classroom teacher	Administrativeassignment through consultation process	Yes	Yes	20 yrs	6 yrs	4 yrs	1 yr	2
Marg		Classroom teacher		No	No	15 yrs	4 yrs			
Liz	Valley-view Elem.	Junior classroom teacher	Administrativeassignment through consultation process	No	No	1yr	1 yr	1 yr	1 yr	2
Linda		Classroom teacher		No	No	5 yrs	2 yrs			

Note. All members of each dyad have been given names beginning with the same letter so that teams can be easily identified.

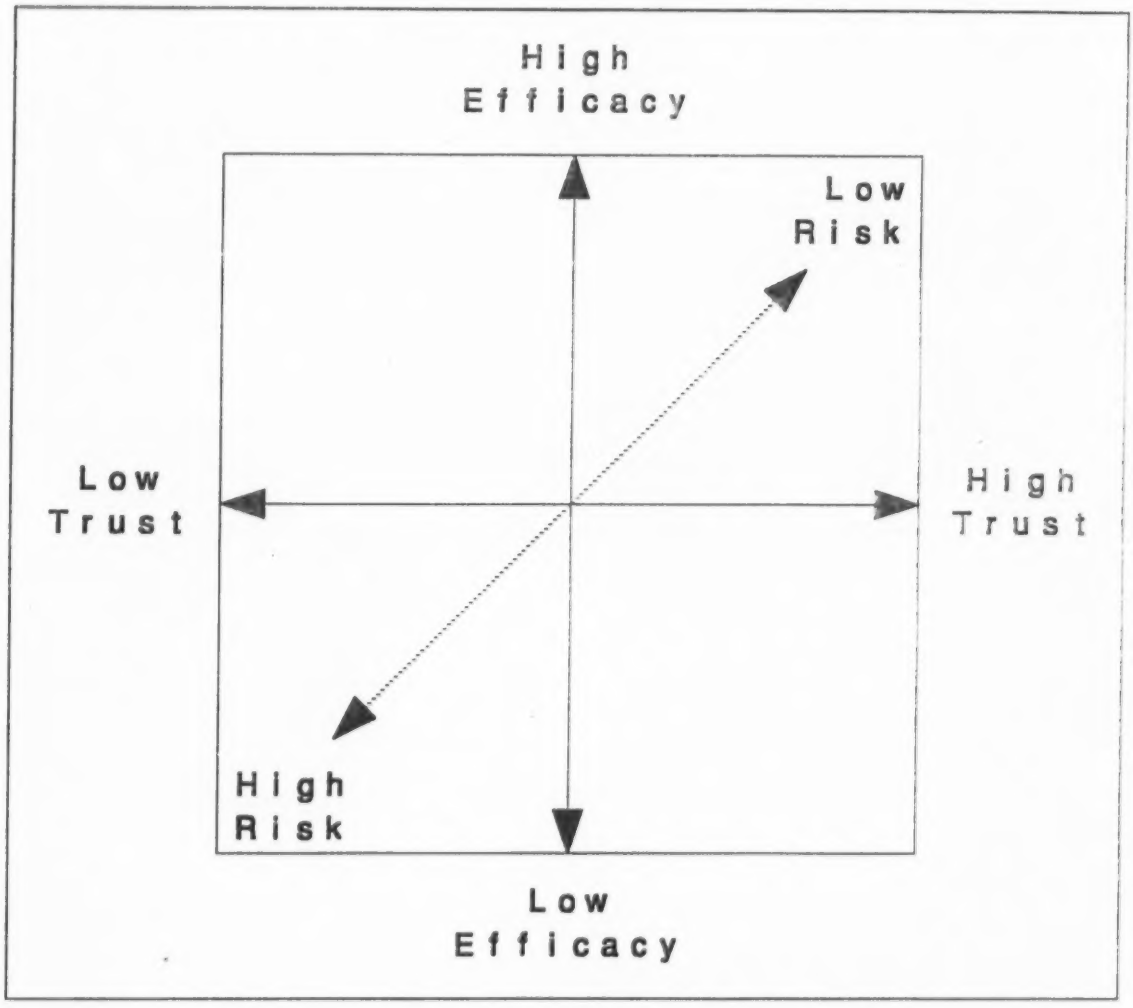

Figure 1. Level of risk perceived by teacher given the teacher's sense of efficacy and his or her degree of trust for the teaching-partner.